

2000

*National Assessment of
Educational Progress*

Information for Principals

Mathematics, Science,
& Reading



INFORMATION FOR PRINCIPALS

It is important that answers to frequently asked questions about NAEP are readily available to you. What follows is a synopsis of information that you may find helpful as questions about the assessment come to you. If there are questions not covered here, or for which there may not be an immediate answer, please call us at 800-223-0267 for prompt assistance.

WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT. YOUR PARTICIPATION IS ESSENTIAL AND VALUED.

PROJECT MISSION. NAEP is authorized by Congress and directed and funded by the U.S. Department of Education (National Center for Educational Statistics) to report on what American students know and can do in key academic subjects. It has produced more than 200 reports in its 30-year history, chronicling trends over time in the performance of 9-, 13-, and 17-year-olds and fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade students. The results are reported in the aggregate for large groups; no student or school data are reported. Information is reported by average proficiency; racial/ethnic and gender status; region; type of school; parents' education; teachers' emphases; and a variety of home and school supports for learning. It is important to note that student participation is voluntary and confidential. **No students' names are ever removed from the school.**

THE CONTENT OF NAEP. By law, for each subject assessed, the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) manages the development of frameworks that detail what students might reasonably be expected to know and do. These frameworks are the "blueprints" for developing tasks that measure the content specified. For information about framework development, please contact Mary Crovo at the National Assessment Governing Board, 202-357-6941.

In 2000, the main task is to conduct the national assessments in mathematics and science at grades four, eight, and twelve and in reading at grade four. The questions have been subjected to rigorous review by teachers and other leaders in the subjects, as well as a careful review by Educational Testing Service to ensure that the questions and possible responses meet the standards of the content specifications, quality, and fairness.

Students are also asked to respond to questions covering demographics, parental education, school conditions, and classroom teaching. Again, this information, which is completely voluntary, is not linked to students, schools, or teachers' names. The questions are routinely asked so that parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders who read the national reports can better understand the relationship between students' experiences

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and their learning. Although many of these questions have been tested and used before, certain minor changes may have been made. Please refer to the special section of this document for more information about the background questions.

CONFIDENTIALITY PROCEDURES. Because reports of individual or school NAEP data are barred by law, the project does not collect the names of participating students, teachers, or administrators. NAEP procedures that ensure confidentiality include tear-off forms that prevent students' names from leaving the school with the test booklets. The portion of the form containing students' names remains in the school in a secure storage envelope for up to six months after the assessment. School officials are asked to return a destruction notice to NAEP at that time to confirm that the information in the storage envelope was destroyed. Throughout its history, NAEP has respected the privacy of individuals and organizations. This trust has never been breached.

PARENTAL NOTICE/CONSENT. Parental consent is not normally required for student participation in NAEP. Parental notice letters, however, are provided by NAEP for use by your local staff, along with adaptable letters if the school, district, or state has a policy of requiring that parental consent be obtained.

EXAMINATION OF SECURE NAEP ITEMS. Quite often, a review of the demonstration book provided to the school coordinator or principal will be sufficient to satisfy the interest of those who want to review the assessment. That booklet, which NAEP encourages officials to reproduce locally, contains all student background questions and sample test questions in mathematics, science, and reading.

Within the limits of staff and resources, however, procedures enable school administrators and parents to review the NAEP questions that will be administered in 2000. These arrangements must be made in advance of the local administration date(s) so that sufficient materials can be available and interested persons can be notified about the location and time for the review. Upon request, our staff will meet with small groups of parents to review the NAEP booklets, with the understanding that no NAEP questions will be duplicated, copied, or removed. These requests may be made to the NAEP data collection staff, or by contacting the National Center for Education statistics at 202-219-1831. Individuals without children in the assessment who wish to examine secure NAEP items are invited to contact the U.S. Department of Education's Freedom of Information Act officer at 202-708-4753.

OBTAINING NAEP QUESTIONS. Most NAEP questions and tasks are not generally released to the public because these materials are reused and thus must be kept secure if the project is to report trends in academic performance accurately. However, approximately one-third of each assessment is designated for public release; each NAEP report contains a sample of actual test questions. The questions released for public and research use can be obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP Released Exercises, 555 New Jersey Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20208–5653. Previously released questions may also be viewed on the NCES Web site at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>.

EXPLANATION OF NAEP STUDENT BACKGROUND QUESTIONS. The usefulness of the national assessment results increases when parents, educators, and policymakers are able to study the proficiencies (or scores) along with information about student experience, the school environment, and opportunities for students to learn. Following are all of the general background questions for mathematics, science, and reading and a discussion of some information that has proven to be important as the direct result of asking certain questions. Other questions are asked only of eighth- or twelfth-grade students. When there is more than one version of a question (indicated by “OR”), individual students will respond to only one form of the question.

NAEP BACKGROUND QUESTIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS:

1. Which best describes you?

This question uses racial/ethnic categories for reporting assessment results based on census classifications. This is a self-report question. For students who state multiracial origins, the Other category is recommended. Policymakers and the public find this variable essential to describe segments of the student population who may be having difficulty, doing well, or improving in performance over time.

2. If you are Hispanic, what is your Hispanic background?

This question has been requested by Hispanic/Latino organizations to indicate, more precisely, the achievement of this population group.

3. How long have you lived in the United States?

Students who are new to the country and its culture and educational process do not, on average, perform as well as native-born students. Policymakers need information that will help them understand the performance of students who recently immigrated to the United States.

4. How often do the people in your home speak a language other than English?

Students who speak a language other than English at home may have special needs and perform at a lower level than those who always speak English at home. National as well as state policymakers want this data when interpreting NAEP results and studying the needs of this population group.

5. Did your mother graduate from high school? ("Mother" can be a mother, stepmother, or female guardian.)

6. Did your mother have some education after high school? ("Mother" can be a mother, stepmother, or female guardian.)

7. Did your mother graduate from college? ("Mother" can be a mother, stepmother, or female guardian.)

8. Did your father graduate from high school? ("Father" can be a father, stepfather, or male guardian.)

9. Did your father have some education after high school? ("Father" can be a father, stepfather, or male guardian.)

10. Did your father graduate from college? ("Father" can be a father, stepfather, or male guardian.)

OR

11. How much education did your mother receive? OR How far in school did your mother go?

12. How much education did your father receive? OR How far in school did your father go?

Parental education is strongly correlated with academic achievement. It is also a component of socioeconomic status (SES). NAEP is required by law to report on the performance of students by SES. This information has been used by researchers to explain the dramatic improvement in NAEP scores by Black students as a function of the rise in parental high school completion and college education rates.

13. Is there an encyclopedia in your home?

14. Does your family get a newspaper regularly?

15. Does your family get any magazines regularly?

16. Are there more than 25 books in your home? OR About how many books are in your home?

Questions 13–16 are literacy questions that have been asked for decades. When combined, they provide a composite indicator of the literacy environment in the home. This composite is a good predictor of a family's interest in education and is a component of the NAEP surrogate for SES. NAEP researchers have found that the number of literacy items in the home is correlated with educational performance.

17. About how much television do you usually watch on a school day? OR How much television do you usually watch each day? OR On a school day, about how many hours do you usually watch TV or videotapes outside of school hours?

Students watching television passively are not actively engaging their minds. This is especially true for most commercial television shows. Time spent watching television is time spent not reading, exercising, or interacting socially with peers. In addition, exposure to television creates an intolerance for the pace and format of schooling. NAEP achievement is negatively correlated with large amounts of television viewing.

- 18. How much time do you usually spend on homework each day?**
- 19. About how many pages a day do you have to read in school and for homework?**
- 20. How many hours of additional reading do you do each week on your own outside of school, not in connection with school work?**
- 21. How many days of school did you miss last month?**

The more time that is spent in school, the greater the academic achievement. Although NAEP is administered during the season with the greatest number of colds and influenza outbreaks, there remains a high correlation between school attendance and performance.

- 22. Within the past two years, how many times have you changed schools because you changed where you lived? OR Since you started first grade, how many times have you changed schools, not counting when you were promoted to the next grade?**

Our country is based on economic and geographic mobility. Approximately one-third of the students will move at least once before high school graduation. Students who move a great deal tend to have lower educational performance. This question was requested by state policymakers to help understand state NAEP data.

- 23. How often do you discuss things you have studied in school with someone at home?**

Students who discuss homework with parents or siblings perform better than those students who do not discuss education issues at home.

- 24. How safe do you feel at school?**

25. Is there a computer at home that you can use? OR How often do you use a computer at home for schoolwork?

26. Do you use the Internet at home?

Students are increasingly using computers to do their homework. Policymakers wish to monitor this trend and study the possible differential effects on performance for students who may not have access to these machines.

ADDITIONAL QUESTION ASKED OF EIGHTH AND TWELFTH GRADERS:

1. How much education do you think you will complete?

Students with high academic expectations generally score higher on NAEP than other students. This question monitors this trend over time. As policies change and greater or lesser numbers of students think that they can afford college, these numbers change.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS ASKED OF TWELFTH GRADERS:

1. How many hours per week do you usually work in a part-time job?

This question seeks to understand the extent of student involvement in part-time work. It is important to provide parents, community, and education leaders with information about how these activities may affect student achievement.

2. What do you expect that your main activity will be in the year after you leave high school?

Students with high academic expectations generally score higher on NAEP than other students. This question monitors this trend over time. As policies change and greater or lesser numbers of students think that they can afford college, these numbers change.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, OR FOR PROMPT FIELD STAFF SUPPORT, PLEASE CALL 800-283-6237.

On behalf of NAEP, the project team wishes to thank you and other members of your school system for agreeing to participate in the NAEP assessment. NAEP's benchmark data about student achievement and instructional emphases that support it are widely used for staff development, curriculum planning, and briefing the many deliberative bodies concerned with student performance. By your voluntary assistance, you join a cooperative partnership with school leaders across the country who believe that information about this nation's educational progress is a critical and objective ingredient for public and professional discussion about policy and direction. It is also an important way to measure our success in ensuring that all students learn to use their minds well.

